

Song & Prayer

Offers an opportunity to leave distractions behind, become present, connect with our spirits.

Invite everyone to quiet down, close their eyes if they wish, and listen to a song you've chosen that matches the theme. You can use one of these suggestions, or one of your choosing:

- [“Am I Asking Too Much?”](#) by Naomi Shelton & the Gospel Queens
- [“We Shall be Known”](#) by MaMuse

When the song ends, lead the group in a moment for grounding, in whatever way you are most comfortable – a prayer spoken aloud in the moment, a pause for silent meditation, or reading a pre-written prayer. Here is a sample prayer you can use:

God of our hearts, spirit of Life and of Love: we are grateful for this time and space to come together. To pause, listen, and share. To hear from beyond the boundaries of our own thoughts, and to grow, by connecting with each other. May we feel a sense of rest and restoration, as we enrich each other's lives through our time together, today. Amen.

Icebreaker

Helps the group begin to get to know each other, try out sharing, and learn who's in the room.

How did you feel about “back to school” season, when you were younger? Do you have any special memories of that time?

This Season's Theme at WellSprings

An introduction to this season's topic for discussion within the congregation.

Read aloud the introduction to the current message series:

“With battles raging all around us, and voices getting louder and louder, it can be tempting to back away from controversy and conflict. We try not to get involved, hope things will work out, or that someone else will show up to fix it... but sometimes we need to take the leap ‘off the fence.’ Instead of retreating, we show up for each other, we collaborate across differences, we stay humble and willing to learn. If we do, we just might find a stronger, more durable safety than any fence can promise: one that's rooted in our ability to rely on each other.”

Ask the group: if you had to choose one word to describe how this topic lands with you, what would it be? Invite folks to share their word and a few sentences about why they chose it.

Questions for Discussion

Feel free to choose from among the questions below, or answer as many as you have time for.

- Describe a time when you felt someone really “had your back” – when you were well-supported, or accompanied, through something difficult. What (if anything) were your

Soul Bite Guide: Off The Fence

our Fall 2023 Message Series

support-people risking or sacrificing, in order to show up for you? What do you think they gained, from the experience?

- Have you ever been in the minority group in a room – or even, the “only” one – of your race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or other aspect of identity that is important to you? What has it been like for you, to be the “only” one?
- The Muslim religion places a strong emphasis on finding beauty in diversity. There is a verse in the Quran, indicating that human beings were specifically made to be different – created in different groups, tribes, and nations so that they can come to learn, know, and understand each other. Does this resonate for you? Does it sound like anything you’ve heard, in other religious traditions? If you believe that God made us to be different, how does that shift your approach to issues of diversity – or experiences of conflict?
- Years ago, many universities and workplaces began to train students and staff in something called “cultural competence.” They hoped to help people anticipate the differences they may encounter, when interacting with a diverse population. Now, many are taking a new approach instead: “cultural humility.” Rather than providing categorical knowledge about a group of people (as in the “competence” approach), cultural humility gives people tools: to ask questions with respect and curiosity, to reflect on and set aside one’s own assumptions, and to adopt an ongoing posture of openness to what they do not know. Have you ever used “cultural humility” skills, when interacting with others? Where, in your life right now, might you find them useful?
- Speaking about the hopelessness that we might feel, when we begin to understand the depth and reach of various social problems, activist Mariame Kaba says “let this radicalize you, rather than lead you to despair.” To radicalize means to shift a person or group's opinions toward either end of the political spectrum. What are some of the negative and positive associations we might have with the word “radicalize?” Do you think there are any forms of “radicalization” that would be preferable to despair?
- Unitarian Universalists believe we all carry some kind of power. Everyone holds the power of love, and the power of transformation – for ourselves and for the groups and communities of which we are a part. What are some ways that you might use the power and privileges you hold, to do some good, within your own communities? How might you use your power to transform yourself?
- Is there anywhere in your life where you find yourself “on the fence” – on an issue, a conflict, a topic of debate? What would you need in order to take the leap off the fence, in that situation?

Closing

Gives a sense of completion to the conversation, and helps all transition back to their day.

Invite everyone to choose one word that describes how they’re feeling now, as your time together comes to a close. Ask folks to “popcorn” up and share their word one by one. When all have shared, thank them for gathering together today.